

Roy Cooper and Eric Reeves, assisted the Board by attending and speaking at the hearings. At each hearing, Jane Smith Patterson, Senior Advisor to the Governor for Science and Technology and Executive Director of the North Carolina Board of Science and Technology, made a presentation on the history of universal service and the benefits currently available to: individuals that live in high-cost areas, low-income individuals, schools and libraries, and rural health care providers. After taking questions, the Board opened the floor to public comment. The Board also accepted comments submitted by email or U.S. mail. Approximately 250 individuals attended these hearings representing thousands of others.

Comments Received

The Board received verbal or written comments from more than 100 people. Transcripts of the comments received verbally, as well as all comments transmitted in written form are attached to this report. The comments received can be divided into roughly six categories regarding: Lifeline/Link Up, Schools and Libraries, Community Colleges, Non-Public Colleges and Universities, Non-profit "community networking" Organizations, and Disabled Individuals.

Those who commented were generally positive about the benefits to low-income individuals, schools and libraries, and rural health care providers, that were made available or increased with the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 (TA96). There was, however, a great deal of concern about groups of people that may have been left out of the TA96 funding. These individuals would not only miss the opportunity to reap the benefits of the information revolution but would be left behind as the computer skills and information access become the keys to success in the 21st century.

The comments received are summarized by category in the subsections listed below. The number of comments the Board received regarding each subsection is listed in the beginning of each subsection. As many individuals' comments pertained to more than one subsection, the total number of comments received is less than the sum of comments received for all the subsections.

1. Lifeline/Link Up--___ comments

- The comments received on Lifeline and Link Up were generally positive. Lifeline and Link Up provide discounts low-income households to promote higher telephone penetration. The benefits of having a telephone: to call a teacher, to get a job, to call for emergency assistance are self-evident. [quote here if I have one] North Carolina has participated in these programs at the maximum level since their inception in the mid-1980s.
- Concern was raised about these programs' low subscribership. In 1996 only 563 [check number] households used Link Up discounts when they activated new phone service and only 23,200 [check number] households participated in Lifeline. It is estimated that more than 300,000 households in North Carolina may be eligible to participate in these programs.
- It was suggested that the state North Carolina make a concerted effort to publicize better these programs. [quote here]
- It was further suggested that North Carolina examine the idea of creating a system through which individuals who participate in one or more of the qualifying programs be automatically enrolled in Lifeline and Link Up. [quote here]
- It was also suggested that North Carolina expand the eligibility criteria for Lifeline and Link Up to be consistent with that now endorsed by the FCC. To be eligible for Lifeline or Link Up in North Carolina, one must be a recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps, or TANF/Work First. The FCC recommends that eligibility to receive Lifeline or Linkup be based on participation in the above mentioned programs and also Medicaid, federal public housing assistance or Section 8, or the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). [quotes]

2. Schools and Libraries--___ comments